

**Agenda Item
3/31/2010**

Consideration and evaluation of the Ernie Pyle State Historic Site

The Ernie Pyle State Historic Site was established in 1976 and is located in Dana, Vermillion County, Indiana. The site consists of the house from the farm where Ernie Pyle was born, the visitor center (two linked, reconstructed WWII era Quonset huts) which houses exhibits, gift shop and library and a maintenance garage. The site memorializes the life of war correspondent, Ernie Pyle and his Pulitzer Prize winning works documenting the lives of soldiers during WWII. The site is not on the National Register of Historic Places because the house was moved from its original location thus does not illustrate the original setting or appearance. The Greek revival architecture of the house is of note. The property's location in Dana, Indiana, means that there is ready access to utilities. A sewage treatment facility is currently planned with municipal sewers eventually replacing the individual septic systems in the town.

The house has been extensively researched because of controversy arising from the documentation (and lack thereof) of Ernie Pyle's birth in the actual structure. Currently, there are two schools of thought on the subject, one as adamant as the other. A previous site manager completed his Master's Thesis on this subject, finding no primary documents neither proving nor disproving either theory. Thus, there is not sufficient historic significance to justify the costs of continued rehabilitation and maintenance.

Fiscal concerns have been mounting with the historic site since 1996, a year after the opening of the Visitor Center. In the last five years, visitation has hovered between 1,000 and 1,800 visitors per year with revenue averaging \$7,200. Both of these numbers are three times less than any other State Historic Site. As a result, the cost per visitor is extremely high. Reduction in operating hours has not had significant impact on the number of annual visitors or revenue.

One of the main factors affecting the visitation and revenue is the site's remote location. Dana is not on a major interstate nor is it within convenient driving distance of one. An unfortunate fire in 2006 burned more than ½ of its downtown area and the town has not recovered. Far more visitors can be exposed (approximately 70,000) to Ernie Pyle's life work through incorporation into the Indiana State Museum's permanent exhibits.

For the reasons stated, the Ernie Pyle State Historic Site is recommended for deaccession. As is standard practice for the division, an arrangement with a non-profit group is being pursued to take over operational duties. The obvious choice is the Friends of Ernie Pyle, the site's support organization. The Friends group was offered the site in December, 2009, with final determination still pending. Should the group decline and none other steps in, the division will pursue appropriate disposition.